

**Remark of Janet Coit
State Director, The Nature Conservancy
USDA Farm Bill Forum
Narragansett, Rhode Island
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Thank you Undersecretary Mark Rey for allowing this opportunity to provide input into the development of the Bush Administration's 2007 Farm Bill proposal. I am Janet Coit, State Director of The Nature Conservancy of Rhode Island. The Nature Conservancy is an international nonprofit conservation organization with chapters and offices in every state and over 1 million members. Our mission is to preserve the plants, animals and natural communities that represent the diversity of life on earth by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive.

The Farm Bill is one of our nation's most important environmental laws. Its conservation programs under the jurisdiction of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) play an important and increasing role in promoting conservation of land and water resources in Rhode Island.

The Nature Conservancy and other non-profit organizations work closely with NRCS using farm bill programs to conserve remaining farms and forests, restore river buffers, grasslands and other habitats, improve land management practices in sensitive areas and within watersheds, and as a partner in efforts to gather and analyze data that will advance conservation goals. The Conservancy is working with NRCS across the state, from the coastal farms and shrublands along the Sakonnet River, to the salt marshes and meadows on Block Island, to the tributaries and mainstem of the Pawcatuck River System.

In Rhode Island, the NRCS is an important federal leader, and programs like the Farm and Ranchland Protection Program, the Grasslands Reserve Program, the Wetlands Reserve Program and the Environmental Quality Improvement Program provide critical resources and leverage important results when it comes to conservation of invaluable natural assets.

Today, I would like to comment on question 4: How can farm policy best achieve conservation and environmental goals? I have seven main points.

1. Maintain habitat friendly agriculture and forestry and increase funding available for long term easements.
 - Generally, revisions to the 2007 farm bill should eliminate incentives that encourage conversion or intensified production on ecologically sensitive lands. Also, revisions should strengthen existing conservation programs and create new programs to encourage conversion back to native habitat and discourage conversion to more intensive uses, especially development.

2. Address invasive species threats associated with agriculture and forests.
 - Amend the Plant Protection Act to bolster federal capabilities of preventing the introduction of plants and pests that cause harm to both our natural environment and agricultural economy.
3. Target better the resources of farm bill conservation programs.
 - Grant NRCS Chief and FSA Administrator the ability to select sites or species to target a portion of program funds where USDA programs have the largest broad scale impact per dollar spend.
4. Promote improved water quality and flow regimes impacted by agriculture and forest management.
 - Target water quality programs on a watershed basis to address water quality and quantity concerns.
5. Increase incentives for adaptive management of native species.
 - Cost share for management of land under USDA rental agreements and easements to: 1) mimic natural disturbances and 2) control invasive species.
6. Measure success and employ measures to refine program implementation and allocations.
 - Require ecologically based measures tied to the purpose of the conservation program and use performance measures to inform and modify program rules and implementation.
7. Increase resources to monitor compliance of existing conservation requirements.
 - Require NRCS to return to the historical spot check rate regarding conservation compliance and strengthen sod buster language to discourage conversion of grassland to row cropland using farm program subsidies and programs.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment. I look forward to continuing to work with you and the NRCS on programs and policies to promote conservation of natural resources.